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ABSTRACT

This report describes the results of 2 questionnaires designed to measure students' perceptions of and satisfaction with aspects of their small liberal arts college environment. The test was administered to samples of students enrolled in the experimental program, alternates (students who had volunteered for the experimental program but were not selected) and students in the conventional curriculum. It was found that: experimental students viewed the college as less impulsive and more traditional than did other groups; they saw themselves, faculty, others and administrators as less traditional than did other groups; rated the college higher on sympathy and found it more non-directing. They saw themselves as more impulsive, liberal, egg-headed and rebellious than did other students. They were more likely to drop out for academic reasons and less comfortable with other students. The conventional curriculum students saw everything and everybody as more disciplined, more personal and friendly. They viewed other students as more rebellious than themselves, and were most likely to drop out for nonacademic reasons. The alternates saw students as least disciplined, and other students and faculty as less sympathetic. They were most comfortable with other students, but least satisfied with the academic side of college life. (AF)

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# Attitudes of College Freshmen in an Experimental Program

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## Attitudes of College Freshmen in an Experimental Program

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An experimental program initiated at a small liberal arts college, involving about a quarter of the freshman class, was the result of several years of faculty-administration deliberation over problems of entering freshmen. One of these problems was their increasingly high level of preparation; another was the lack of student-faculty interaction characteristic of the general education program. The experimental program involved four "area programs" which substituted in part for the conventional general education requirements. The areas were Literature-Art, Religion, Behavioral Sciences, and Natural Sciences. There was freedom in methods by which a student could cover the topics. Evaluation was accomplished through comprehensive examinations. Conventional courses were available and special presentations were made in each area, but the student was not required to attend. A tutorial system was used where each tutor was responsible for about twelve students, helping plan strategies for learning in each area. Tutors also conducted group sessions on common topics. The area programs were designed and administered by area supervisors who were responsible for the syllabus and served as subject matter consultants. Student assistants (upper-classmen) assisted both the tutors and the area supervisors.

In a preliminary survey of experimental freshman programs it became evident that evaluation processes were not involved extensively. Such programs were either very small, or involved the entire freshman class. Thus this program, involving a significant but not major segment of the freshman class, seemed uniquely suitable for comparative evaluation of student responses.

## METHOD

**SUBJECTS**: Initially Program 2, the experimental program, involved sixty-six freshmen, about a quarter of the class. These were selected from students who volunteered during the previous summer. Volunteers who were not selected were observed as a special group, assumedly similar to the experimental subjects in interests and abilities, but exposed to the traditional program. The selection of the experimental group was carried out so as to make it as representative as possible of the entire class, on the basis of SAT scores. Administration of an attitude and interest survey at the beginning of the year resulted in data showing the volunteer group to be higher on several scales relevant to academic achievement and college success. Aptitudes were higher for the experimental group as well (Table 1).

**PROCEDURE**: The A.P.E. Test of Pervin (1) is a semantic differential questionnaire which measures a student's perceptions of aspects of his college environment. Two forms of the test were used, involving the same six concepts but a different set of fifty-two adjective pairs. In the middle of the questionnaire is another type of questionnaire having to do with satisfaction of various aspects of the environment: this has high face validity.

This test was given to samples of Program 2 students, "Alternates" (volunteers not selected), and Program 1 students ("conventional freshmen"). Cells representing different SAT levels in both verbal and mathematical aptitudes were filled proportionately with representatives of each. Data were processed by computer, and means were compared via *t*-test (it was felt that this was powerful enough for the kinds of results desired, in spite of the non-linearity of the scale.) The results were also studied for comparative patterns of responses across concepts, regardless of statistical outcomes. The students took the test about midway in the academic year.

## RESULTS

A small sample of the results is presented below, with patterns of responses described on the left side of the page and statistical information reported on the right. "A" stands for "Alternates," "P1" for the conventional freshmen, and "P2" for the experimental group. In Pair No. 1, for example, "ADMIN" stands for the concept "Administration;" it appears with the first adjective pair under "P1 vs. P2," indicating that P1 was significantly higher than P2 for this adjective pair for this concept.* Thus P1 students saw the administration as well-rounded to a greater degree than P2 students saw them. By the same token, P2 saw the college as more well-rounded than the Alternates saw it, etc.

*A simple t-test was used; significant pairs totaled about twenty percent of the sample. While the basic scale is non-linear, it was felt that the power of the test plus examination of the patterns of response gave adequate protection against Type 1 errors.

NOTE: The six concepts, each having the same fifty-two adjective pairs, were "SELF", "STUDENTS", "FACULTY", "ADMINISTRATION", "COLLEGE", and "IDEAL COLLEGE".

Selected Results from Form A

N's: 9(P2), 9(A), 8(P1)

| *Adjective Pair with Discussion* (low on left to high on right) | *Indication of Significance* P1 vs. P2 | P1 vs. A | P2 vs. A |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. *Egg-headish - Well Rounded*<br>A saw college, students, and faculty more egg-headish; P2 saw self, administration, and ideal college more so. Generally A and P2 seem to have views in common here. | ADMIN | COLL<br>STU<br>FAC | |
| 2. *Bureaucratic - Unstructured*<br>P1 saw all concepts as less structured than P2 or A, i.e. P1 saw things as *less* bureaucratic, except on ideal college where A saw it as least structured. This contrasts with hypothesized outcomes: *P2* was designed to be less structured and less bureaucratic. The number of significant differences here indicate a relatively powerful reaction of an unexpected nature. | COLL<br>FAC<br>STU<br>ADMIN | -ID COLL* | |

* "-" means that A was higher than P1.

3. *Aspiring - Easygoing*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| P1's saw selves, students, administration and ideal college as more easygoing, less aspiring: P2's saw college and faculty as more easygoing. P2's show elements of drive or compulsiveness here. | SELF | SELF<br>STU<br>ADMIN | STU |

4. *Ritualistic - Spontaneous*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| P2's see all concepts as more ritualistic, less spontaneous. This represents another reversal. A's saw all concepts as more spontaneous, an interesting contrast to P2 since they are originally from the same pool, yet are in P1. | | -ADMIN*<br>- | -COLL<br>-SELF<br>-ADMIN<br>-ID COLL |

5. *Vocational - Avocational*

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| P1 saw all concepts as less vocational: this assumedly shows *less* interest (on part of P1) in college as a preparation for the future in terms of a profession or graduate school. This seems to be a rather powerful difference, considering the number of significant differences. It also could relate to expectancies for extracurricular life reflected in the satisfaction questionnaire. | STU<br>FAC | COLL<br>STU<br>FAC | |

*Selected Results from Form B*

N's: P2,45; A,19; P1,18

1. *Disciplined - Undisciplined*

P1's saw "My College," "My Self," "Faculty," "Administration," and "Ideal College" as slightly more disciplined than did P2's who saw "Students" as more disciplined. (Alternates saw them as least disciplined, also faculty and administration.) Differences on "Ideal College" were slight. Alternates saw themselves as different even in context of P1, implying that P2's views were not entirely a function of their program.

-SELF
STU
-FAC

2. *Self-interested - Humane*

P1 saw administration as more humane; A saw college and administration as more humane than P2 did; this may reflect a reaction to the administration of the P2 program by area supervisors, i.e. professor coordinating and administering area programs in science, in literature, etc. for the experimental program.

ADMIN
.005

-ADMIN
-COLL

3. *Lustful - Serious*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P1's saw all concepts as less serious. A's saw selves and administration as more serious than other groups did. | | -SELF -ADMIN<br>-ADMIN .005<br>.01 |

4. *Unfriendly - Friendly*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P2 students saw college, selves, students, faculty, administration, and ideal college as *less* friendly than Program 1, with *self* and *students* markedly so. Alternates were in between on all. | SELF<br>.005<br>STU<br>.0005 | SELF |

5. *Formal - Informal*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| P1 saw college and students markedly *less* formal; A also had this view relative to P2. | COLL<br>STU<br>.0005 | -COLL<br>-STU |

*Selected Results from Satisfaction Questionnaire*

Midway through the A.P.E. there is a satisfaction questionnaire which samples attitudes from another point of view, one relevant to the information gathered in the semantic differential. Some results from this section of the test are reported below:

1. How likely is it that you will at some time drop out of college?

Probably 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 Definitely Not

Form B (from low to high): A, then P2, then P1 (Mean 8.74)
Form A: P1, then A, then P2 (Mean 6.77)

Interpretation: Inconclusive, but A more likely to drop out than P2.

2. How likely are you to drop out for academic reasons? (low is probable)

Form A: P2, P1, A (Mean 9.35)
Form B: P2, A, P1 (Mean 9.46)

Program 2 shows that it is upset over academic matters, while A is about even with P1, implying that the greater structure of P1 gives security needed by P2-type students.

3. How likely are you to drop out for non-academic reasons? (low is probable)

Form A: P1, A, P2 (Mean 5.81)
Form B: P1, P2, A (Mean 7.21)

Here the dissatisfaction of P1 with non-academic life is evident; however, A and P2 are about even, implying that it is not the program (P2 vs. P1) but rather a difference in expectations. Perhaps the P2 students are less in need of a certain kind of social life than the P1 students, and do not feel its absence as keenly.

4. How comfortable do you feel with most of the students at your college? (high is completely *un*comfortable)

Form A: No differences (Mean 4.15)
Form B: A, P1, P2 (Mean 4.20)

Alternates seem to be most "at home." Perhaps this implies that the "P2-type," which A represents, has met the challenges of conventional curriculum in high school, and finds the conventional college curriculum familiar and easy to handle.

5. How similar do you feel your values are to the values of the faculty at your college? (Identical - Opposite)

Form A: P1, P2, A (Mean 4.27)
Form B: P2, A, P1 (Mean 4.24)

The two forms return different results regarding P1, but place P2 as less at odds with the faculty than A.

6. How much do you agree with the administrative rules and regulations at your college?
(Absolute agreement 1--11 Complete disagreement)

Form A: A, P1, P2 (Mean 6.31)
Form B: A, P2, P1 (Mean 5.61) (P1 significantly greater than A)

Illustrates identification of alternates with administration; with (5) above, indicates that A's tend to bypass the faculty in their identification and relationships.

7. So far, what kind of times have you had at your college?
(Great times 1—11 Poor times)

Form A: A, P1, P2 (Mean 4.58)
Form B: A, P1, P2 (Mean 4.60)

Alternates seem to be enjoying themselves most, then Program 1, then Program 2. This says a lot about the program if we assume that Alternates are similar to P2's to begin with, but if we do, then we contradict the previous outcomes which indicate that P2's are more satisfied with non-academic aspects of college. One resolution is to say that P1's expect more from the non-academic side of college, and are thus more dissatisfied although they enjoy it more than the P2's who expect less.

## General Summary of Results

Program 2 students (experimental students) viewed the college as less impulsive, more traditional than other groups viewed it; they saw themselves, the faculty, others and administration as less traditional than other groups did. They rated the college higher than other groups on sympathy, and found it more non-directing. They viewed themselves as more impulsive, liberal, and egg-headed than other students viewed themselves, also saw themselves as more rebellious. Yet they regarded themselves as less action-oriented. Thus the Program 2 students seem to approximate the stereotype of the better-prepared, more idealistic element of the student population, and showed a positive attitude toward the college in general. However, they also indicated that the college, faculty, and administration impressed them as more ritualistic and less spontaneous, and felt they received less guidance. The satisfaction questionnaire indicated that they were more likely to drop out for academic reasons than the other groups and were less comfortable with other students.

Program 1 (conventional curriculum) students saw the college, themselves, faculty, and administration as more disciplined. They also saw all concepts as more personal and friendly. They viewed other students as more rebellious than themselves, and also viewed others as more motivated. On the other hand they were the most likely to drop out for non-academic reasons, as evidenced by their responses on the satisfaction questionnaire. They were more satisfied than the others with the academic program.

The "Alternates" appeared different from either of the other two. They saw students as least disciplined, felt that the college, other students, and faculty were less sympathetic. They saw the faculty as most non-directing (in contrast to Program 2 students, who were in the "non-directive" program!). They saw themselves as more motivated. They viewed other students as sociable to a greater degree than did the others. They indicated that they were more comfortable with other students than either of the other groups indicated themselves to be. They were the least satisfied with the academic side of college life, and the most satisfied with the non-academic! They also indicated that they had had the best times of all three groups, and the least wish to attend another college for *non*-academic reasons.

## DISCUSSION

Although the "Alternates" were more like the experimental group originally, by mid-year they were more alienated from the college academically than any of the other freshmen, and yet were better adapted socially. They appeared to be similar in some respects to "activist" groups on other campuses. One might conclude that the experimental program, in challenging

this type of student and making him somewhat anxious about his own progress and responsibilities toward freedom of action, renders him less likely to challenge the status quo. Experimental students were less satisfied than others with the academic program, however, in spite of the intensive effort put into "area program" development by the faculty in order to challenge them and individualize the learning process. This may imply that one cannot compete successfully with the traditional curriculum in terms of clarity, depth, and general intellectual satisfaction without more effort and some trial and revision. On the other hand, the alternates were even *less* satisfied with the *conventional* curriculum.

The experimental group found their environment more sympathetic, but also more bureaucratic, ritualistic, and snobbish. This has interesting implications concerning reactions to innovative programs. There was also a high degree of anxiety and insecurity observed by directors and tutors, which did not show up clearly on this particular instrument. Subjective observations of the investigator indicate that the experimental students faced an existential dilemma, wanting the freedom and challenge of the new program but also the security, organization, depth, and clarity of the conventional one.

The greater satisfaction of both the experimental group and the alternates seems to imply that these students were looking for different things than the others: they found the environment enjoyable while the "conventional" freshmen evidently found it socially dull and unstimulating. Perhaps there are different reference groups operating here: one can imagine the more conservative type of student looking toward the greater range and frequency of social activities and entertainment on a large university campus with some envy. Opportunities which existed

for extracurricular participation were evidently utilized more by the Alternates than by either the regular or experimental freshmen: perhaps they had more time, since they were better prepared and did not have the challenge of the experimental program. It may also be that the anxieties created by the experimental program interfered with participation in extracurricular activities. Such participation has become increasingly difficult to balance with academic requirements on this particular campus in recent years, due in part to increasing academic pressure and a more compressed schedule (three term, three courses per term).

## SUMMARY

The experimental program failed to satisfy the type of freshmen who volunteered for it in academic terms: this failure seems to be in the realm of depth and organization of subject matter, on the basis of subjective observation of the investigator. In another sense, however, there is evidence that the program avoided even greater dissatisfaction with the conventional curriculum, such as that demonstrated by the group which volunteered for the experimental program but was not admitted due to lack of space. This latter group, however, was more comfortable with the non-academic side of college than either of the other groups. These considerations may imply that such an experimental program can avoid some of the effects of the conventional curriculum on students who are better prepared and more highly motivated academically. However, they also imply that the design of an experimental program is no trivial matter, and requires trial and revision over several years in order to become effective. Generally, these results may be taken to imply that there are at least two, perhaps more different types of freshmen entering colleges today, and that they can profit

from different types of programs as well as different degrees and types of extracurricular activities. Perhaps two programs are not enough, and there should be three or more alternatives open, with opportunity to change from one to the other on the basis of experience early in the freshman year.

## REFERENCES

Pervin, Lawrence "A twenty-College Study of Student and College Interaction Using TAPE: Rationale, Reliability and Validity." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 58: 290-302; October 1967.

**TABLE 1**

**S.A.T. Profiles of Experimental and Regular Freshmen**

***(by percentages)***

**Verbal**

**Original P-2 Group (66) *vs.* All Freshmen Dormitory Students (280)**

| | **350-399** | **400-449** | **450-499** |
|---|---|---|---|
| P-2 | 0.0 | 7.6 | 4.5 |
| All | 0.0 | 4.0 | 11.8 |
| | **500-549** | **550-599** | **600-649** |
| P-2 | 10.6 | 22.7 | 12.1 |
| All | 20.0 | 21.4 | 17.9 |
| | **650-699** | **700-749** | **750-799** |
| P-2 | 28.8 | 10.6 | 3.0 |
| All | 15.3 | 6.0 | 2.1 |

**Mathematical**

| | **350-399** | **400-449** | **450-499** |
|---|---|---|---|
| P-2 | 0.0 | 4.5 | 3.0 |
| All | 1.0 | 5.0 | 7.1 |
| | **500-549** | **550-599** | **600-649** |
| P-2 | 24.2 | 22.7 | 15.1 |
| All | 21.0 | 18.2 | 20.9 |
| | **650-699** | **700-749** | **750-799** |
| P-2 | 12.1 | 9.1 | 9.1 |
| All | 13.9 | 8.6 | 4.6 |